

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL RISKS FOR CITIZENS

There are hazardous materials in every community, and ours is no exception. There have been several incidents over the past few years. If we review the incidents that have occurred, we can see that they cover a wide range of incident types. We have had a vapor release from a chemical plant, pipeline leaks, traffic accidents that caused a variety of spills, and a couple of freight train accidents that could have resulted in unintentional releases; just to name a few. If we look at the storage locations, manufacturing sites, and traffic patterns used by shippers, we see a general pattern. The pattern is that almost every part of Whitfield County is affected by the storage, manufacture, use, and transportation of hazardous materials. This confirms the fact that we all use and rely on chemicals and other hazardous products in our daily lives. Although it is true that they are found throughout the county, it is equally true that some of the largest quantities of hazardous materials are stored by our plants and utilities, or are transported over our major highways and railroads.

The "Serious Seven" chemicals of concern that could impact the county include the corrosives; chlorine, ammonia, hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen sulfide, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen chloride, and LP Gas which is a flammable. These chemicals purify our water, chill and help in the processing of our food, and act as the basis for many of the chemical processes which are used by industry. These chemicals have different characteristics, but they do have one thing in common. They all pose a danger if they are not contained and controlled.

Despite the manufacture and transportation of millions of pounds of hazardous substances each year without incident, the possibility still exists of an unintended release. Any discharge of a corrosive chemical into the air could cause problems by irritating your eyes and causing difficulty in breathing, while a release of flammable chemicals can cause a fire or explosion.